

DRAMA AND *DHARMA* IN INDIAN SPECULATIONS *

Two things fill the heart with an ever new and ever growing admiration and veneration, the more one reflects upon them: the moral law within me and the starlit sky above my head.

KANT, *The Critique of Practical Reason*.

SAMSTHĀNAKA: Who is going to see you kill her? The park is deserted.

LIBERTINE: Who will see me?

The ten Regions and the Guardians of the park,
And Moon and Sun with flaming rays,
The Wind, and *Dharma*, and the Sky, my Soul,
And Earth who witnesses all good and sin.

Mṛcchakaṭikā, VIII, 24¹.

The twofold myth of the origin of Indian drama which the *Nāṭyaśāstra* narrates at length is the locus for a long development on the links between drama and *dharma*².

* This paper draws its substance from the texts of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *Abhinavabhāratī*, especially those in the first chapter, which I have been translating and analysing with Prof. K.D. Tripathi for the last few years, and which we now intend to publish soon. May this be the opportunity to reiterate my gratitude towards the profound *ācārya* to whom I owe my long-lasting familiarity with these difficult texts, abounding in most elaborate speculations.

1. A little revised, the translation is that of J.A.B. Van Buitenen (*Two Plays of Ancient India*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1971).

2. Indian drama is the object of a treatise composed of thirty seven chapters, the

The first part, which coincides with chapter one, teaches us that drama³ was created by one god – Brahmā – at the request of another god – Indra – in order to remedy the disorders of the world. In the second part – to be found in the last two chapters, i.e. 36 and 37 – we learn that drama came down to us at the request of a king, Nahuṣa, grandson of a mortal and a goddess, viz. Purūravas and the Apsaras Urvaśī.

Therefore, the theatre is the fruit of the combined efforts of gods and men and even, in a certain way, of the alliance between gods and men through the emblematic couple formed by Purūravas and Urvaśī. And behind this narrative one can already perceive the outline of the *dharma* theme: firstly because drama was born in a time of *adharma*, secondly because, as a social and cosmic principle, it includes both mortals and immortals, and lastly because the main protagonist in the narrative is always a King, i.e. the protector par excellence of *dharma*: Indra, King among gods, since he invents drama; Nahuṣa, King among men, because he turns it into a human art.

Dharma, social classes and ages of life

What is this *dharma* for the restoration of which drama was created? Derived from the root *dhṛ* “to hold”, “to maintain”, *dharma* is what holds, the act of holding as well as what is held. In its most general sense, it refers to the norm that defines the relationships between each individual and mankind, cosmos and one’s own self.

Nāṭyaśāstra (NŚ), written in the second century A.D., and which has been the subject of several commentaries – among which only one, Abhinavagupta’s *Abhinavabhāratī* (10th century) has come down to us. The main purpose of this paper is to examine, within the number of pages allowed, the position of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (and its commentary) on the links between drama and *dharma*, as well as to point out its specificity. Hence, its aim will not be to give an account of the current state of research on the problem it deals with. I shall constantly refer to the Parimal edition, especially to vol. I (*Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni with the Commentary *Abhinavabhāratī*, ed. by R.S. Nagar, Delhi-Ahmedabad, Parimal Publications, 1981-1984, 4 vol., Parimal Sanskrit Series, 4).

3. In chapter one, drama is called *nāṭya* but also *nāṭyaveda*, that is “theatre knowledge” or “the theatre as knowledge”.

Yet it is a multiple concept, as Renou unfolds it in *L'Inde Classique*⁴: "To our notion of «law» it adds that of «custom», or «morality», or «religious merit», or even, roughly speaking, «religion»: in a nutshell, it expresses nothing else than the «sacred», to the extent that the Veda, beyond the Smṛti, has codified its expression".

Still, in order to give a full account of the polysemy of the term, it is necessary to add the meaning of "duty", which is to be found, for instance, in such syntagms as *atithidharma* "one's duty to one's guests", or *varṇāśramadharmā* "duty related to the different classes and ages of life", as well as that of "norm" or "rule" which we will see further (*infra*, p. 6) appearing in a key term of Bharata's narrative: *grāmyadharmā*. One may even wonder whether *dharma* could not be also considered as a synonym for "asceticism" or "piety", on the basis of the equivalence established by the texts (see especially *Śakuntalā*) between *dharmāranya* – literally "forest of *dharma*" – and *tapovana*: "forest of asceticism", two terms that refer to a hermitage where Sages devote themselves to ascetic practices and carry out the rites under the protection of the king – unless one is meant to understand that the "forest of asceticism" is the "forest of *dharma*" because it is the place where *dharma* is carried out by ascetics and protected by the king.

Obviously, the meaning of the notion depends on the context. The case becomes even more complex as the term *dharma* can be understood in a narrow meaning or in a wide one, and that some shifts between these two meanings may be observed.

In his article "Sémantique et rhétorique dans la hiérarchie hindoue des «buts de l'homme»"⁵ (p. 151), Charles Malamoud puts forward the following analysis: "In its narrow meaning, i.e. as a *puruṣārtha*, *dharma* is the system of observances taught by the Veda and by the texts stemming from it: he who carries them out accumula-

4. L. RENOU et J. FILLIOZAT, *L'Inde Classique: Manuel des études indiennes*, vol. I, Paris, Payot, 1947. Réimpr. 1985, p. 561.

5. CH. MALAMOUD, "Sémantique et rhétorique dans la hiérarchie hindoue des «buts de l'homme»", in *Cuire le monde*, Paris, La Découverte, 1989, p. 137-163. The article has been translated into english, with a few alterations, in *Way of Life: King, Householder, Renouncer. Essays in honour of Louis Dumont* (Sahibabab, Vikas Publishing House, 1981), under the title: "On the Rhetoric and Semantics of *Puruṣārtha*".

tes merit for the world beyond. But in its wider meaning, *dharma* is the order of the world and of society; concretely, it is the network of relationships that holds the *varṇas* and the four *āśramas* at once united and apart; it is also the sum of individual *svadharmas*". Let us note that all kinds of texts, including the *Abhinavabhāratī*, define that "system of observances" which is *dharma* as the adoption of straightforward behaviour and the celebration of sacrifices.

And here we come to a second level of analysis. Being an abstract entity, *dharma*, as social and cosmic order, is embodied in the multitude of individual *svadharmas*. Therefore, there is one general *dharma* defined as the sum total of individual *svadharmas*. Conversely, the coalescence of individual *svadharmas* guarantees the cohesion of the general *dharma*. Celebrating "the moral law within me and the starlit sky above my head", Kant's sentence, in the conclusion of *The Critique of Practical Reason*, sounds to me as a good illustration of the close link – or even of the equivalence – that is made between *dharma* in its wider meaning – the starlit sky – and *svadharma* – the moral law within our hearts. That is why it has been quoted as an epigraph, along with a dialog of the *Mṛcchakaṭikā* which says the same thing: *dharma* as universal order being the encompassing notion as well as the guardian of *dharma* as social norm which justice embodies.

This *svadharma* itself can be defined as an essentially relative notion in so far as it is related to what is called *varṇāśramadharmā*: the specific duty assigned to each social class (*varṇa*) and stage of life (*āśrama*). Actually, *svadharma* itself consists in privileging such and such *puruṣārtha* – among which *dharma* in its narrow sense – according to sex, social class or stage of life. The *svadharma* of an individual is therefore liable to evolve according to the various phases of life that he experiences.

The Brahmanical system attributes to each man a social competence for such and such *puruṣārtha*, a limited competence which is inflected and above all enlarged by the specific competence brought about by the age one has reached. For instance a *brāhman*, who is marked out by his condition for *mokṣa*, Deliverance, and *dharma*, Order, will also have to abide by *artha*, Interest, and *kāma*, Desire, in the stage of *gṛhastha*, that is while being a householder.

At the lower end of a hierarchy that only takes into account the *dvijas*, or “twice-born ones”, the *vaiśya*, the most socially disfavoured one, since only a competence in the field of *artha* is attributed to his class, will have – at different periods of his life – to abide by *kāma* and *dharma*, or even *mokṣa*, provided he is able to reach the ultimate phase of life, that of renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*).

One may therefore distinguish two orders of coercion and two categories of competence for, as a universal principle, the succession of ages generalises whatever restrictive effect class belonging may have. The superposition of these two orders introduces some degree of liberalisation in the system: whatever his social status, each man is liable to abide by each of the four *puruṣārthas* during his life⁶.

The myth of origin

As we shall see now, the myth of origin which is developed in the first chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* gives a full account of all the aspects of *dharma*.

It shows the link between drama and *dharma* understood in both its meanings: the general *dharma*, which is a way to call social and cosmic order, and the *dhārma* restricted to the system of the *puruṣārthas*, i.e. the law, a system of observances prescribed by the Vedas and the *śāstras*. Besides, it reinforces the principle of interdependence between the general *dharma* and the *svadharmas*, the particular *dharma*, and it highlights the correspondence between *dharma* and the closely related doctrines of the *guṇas* – the three organising principles of cosmos and of the psyche – as well as of the *yugas* or cosmic ages.

6. With the notable exception, however, of the *śūdra* who, as a non-*dvija*, appears, at least theoretically, to stand outside the connected system of *puruṣārthas* and *āśramas*, which is mainly meant for the members of the *trivarga*. And, in any case, *saṃnyāsa*, hence *mokṣa*, are forbidden to him, as shown in the episode of the *Rāmāyaṇa* where the *śūdra* Śambūka is killed by Rāma for practising asceticism (see also *Uttararāmacarita*, act II).

Let us now come to the text proper. Bharata is narrating the origin of drama to the Sages around him:

In the days of yore, O Brāhmans, when the Kṛtayuga of the *svāyambhuvamanvantara* had elapsed – and it happened so till the *vaivasvatamanvantara* – and the Tretāyuga had started, men gave themselves over to rusticity (*grāmyadharma*). Bewildered by jealousy anger, etc., for being under the influence of desire and greed, they were both happy and unhappy, while the gods, Dānavas, Gandharvas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas and the great Urugas trod the Jambudvīpa, ruled by the guardians of the directions, like conquered soil. Then did the gods, led by the great Indra, address Pitāmaha: “We want an object of play to be seen and heard. For these generations of *śūdras*, the practice of the Vedas cannot be passed on orally. Therefore do create a new and fifth Veda meant for all classes”. (NŚ I 8-12)

1. *grāmyadharma*

Let us have a closer look at the commentary and the way it unfolds what is possibly the key term of the passage: *grāmyadharma*. The literal meaning of the term is “village rule or law”, that of peasants or common people, the rule of the vulgar. Lexicons also mention the meaning of “carnal pleasures”, which is probably why Daumal translates it by: “la loi profane des sexes” (“the profane law of sexes”)?. Besides, this derived meaning of “licentiousness” will be developed later on by Abhinavagupta in his commentary on *śūdrajātiṣu* (see *infra*, p. 9). So the *Abhinavabhāratī* explains (p. 10):

Rusticity (*grāmyadharma*) consists in the non-observance of one’s own duty (*svadharma*) which is quite natural in such places [as villages (*grama*)] which are full of people who have not studied the contents of *śāstras*.

Such is the *grāmyadharma*, used here as a synonym for *adharma*: “disorder”. It results in an indirect definition of the *dharma* as an observance of one’s own *svadharma* – an observance enjoined on people by *śāstras*. However, in this portrayal of the disorders of the world, one should take into account each of the participial clauses,

7. R. DAUMAL, *Bharata: L’origine du Théâtre, La Poésie et la Musique en Inde*. Paris, Gallimard, 1970, p. 19.

expressed here in the absolute locative. Thus “when the Kṛtayuga of the *svāyambhuvamanvantara* had elapsed and the Tretāyuga had started” reveals the correspondence between *dharma* and the closely related doctrines of the *yugas* and of the *guṇas*. Indeed, such a situation can only arise at the moment of the Tretāyuga when the *rajas* prevails – and not in the Kṛtayuga, where the *sattva* prevails.

By way of consequence, the Tretāyuga only is suitable for the creation of this new object meant to restore *dharma*: drama.

In the Kṛtayuga where *sattva* prevails, Abhinavagupta observes (p. 10), people remain in their duty (*svadharma*) only and therefore do not strive for happiness and unhappiness with the idea that the former is to be attained and the latter avoided. And in the Tretāyuga, since they belong to *rajas*, they desire to get rid of unhappiness and to reach happiness, for *rajas* is essentially vacillation. Then [only] the royal control is able to prompt them to the actions taught by *śāstras*.

Let us here recall first Manu VII 17 f., about this other correspondence taking place between *dharma* and the royal control: “As the Sages state, the punishment is *dharma*”, as well as the character of Yama himself – the prototype of the human King who embodies *dharma* – whose name means “control, repression”, and whose weapon is the *daṇḍa*, the staff of punishment⁸. Besides, as we learn a little further down in the gloss, royal control is represented in an emblematic way within the text of the treatise by the control exerted by the Lokapālas, or the guardians of the worlds (l. 10 b).

And the commentary adds (p. 10):

Therefore [another] means is to be expounded whereby they will *voluntarily* (*svayam*) indulge themselves into action, and this means is drama.

In line 9, the word order coincides with the logical order: men live under the law of the vulgar, i.e. in *adharma*, because they fail to know the teachings of *śāstras* – as explained by the commentary. Accordingly, they are ruled by desire (*kāma*) and greed (*lobha*) and,

8. Ch. MALAMOUD, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

by allowing themselves to be carried away by jealousy, anger, etc., arising from desire and greed, they experience joy and grief⁹.

2. *sukhitaduḥkhita*

The commentary develops (p. 9-10) this logical sequence backwards, starting with a grammatical remark on the *dvandva* compound, *sukhitaduḥkhita*:

The *tatpuruṣa* compound (*sukhitaduḥkhita*), whose latter component predominantly bears the meaning, expresses the profusion of unhappiness. How can one know that men are happy and unhappy? For they are bewildered by jealousy and anger pervading their hearts and, as shown by the inclusion of “etc.” (*-ādi*), by love and desire as well. Then he gives the respective causes [of the emotions referred to in the text]. Jealousy etc. is caused by falling into the power of desire (*kāma*), anger, etc., by the greed for a kingdom, etc. Why are desire and greed seen in profusion? For the cause of happiness and unhappiness, i.e. the cause of desire, etc., lies in the beginning of rusticity (*grāmyadharmapravṛt-tatva*).

Then Abhinavagupta explains (p. 10) l. 10 – “While the gods trod the Jambudvīpa like conquered soil...” –:

If so, as *adharma* was predominant, one may wonder where [they derived] their happiness from. This is explained by *devaiḥ*. [They were happy] while the gods, i. e. the incarnations of Rudra – Śrīmatvijaya¹⁰ Avimukta, etc. – and the Dānavas, worshipped by men endowed with hearts pervaded by *rajas* and *tamas*, trod the Jambudvīpa like conquered soil. While the gods, etc., trod the Jambudvīpa like conquered soil, i.e. when it had been brought under their control.

9. I would like to go back on the order of clauses in my book (L. BANSAT-BOUDON, *Poétique du théâtre indien. Lectures du Nāṭyaśāstra*. Paris, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, v. 169, 1992, p. 56): “During this period, mortals, whom jealousy and anger make fall prey to desire and greed ignore *dharma* so seriously that...”. It should be corrected as: “During this period, mortals, whom desire and greed make fall prey to jealousy and anger...”.

10. Name of Rudra's personified spear.

Thus, whatever happiness they had was given to them by the gods: the idea is that the gods present in the Jambudvīpa grant and protect *dharma*.

In order to account for the compound “ruled by the guardians of the directions”, the commentator introduces (p. 10) a fictitious contradictor who doubts whether *dharma* may have had – to however limited an extent – any role in a world dominated by *adharma*. Then he provides the following reply: the ultimate guardian and guarantor of *dharma* is the King, the representative on earth of the guardians of the directions:

Nevertheless [*dharma*] is due to the guardians of the directions (*lokapāla*), i.e., [metaphorically] to the King (*narapati*) created by combining the fragments [of powers] belonging to the guardians of the directions. *Pratiṣṭhita*, “ruled by”, means “when people were yoked by them to the means of performing their respective duties (*svadharma*sādhanaṃ *prati niyojite loke*)” [then *dharma* took place].

3. *na vedavyavahāro 'yaṃ saṃśrāvyah śūdrajātiṣu*

However, owing to its coercive character precisely, this royal control does not prove entirely satisfactory and some means must be found in order to encourage men to adopt an upright behaviour – and that means is drama.

There lies the heart of the matter: *dharma* can only be obeyed by free will. Coercion – whether it comes from the *śāstras* and Śruti or from the King – is insufficient. As a hindrance to the free implementation of *dharma*, it constitutes as such a lessening of its principle. Therefore there is a lesson to be drawn from the sight of world disorders: *adharma*, or lawlessness, resulting from not knowing the law, should be remedied by the general spreading of knowledge, which is conceived in such a way as to be an incitement to the adoption of *dharma* by free choice. This is the lesson which is contained in lines 11 and 12:

We want an object of play to be seen and heard. For these generations of *śūdras*, the practice of the Vedas cannot be passed on orally¹¹. Therefore do create a new and fifth Veda meant for all classes.

11. Or, more literally: “These generations of *śūdras*, one cannot make them hear the practice of the Vedas”.

Under the syntagm “the practice of the Vedas”, one can perceive the very notion of *dharma* understood as the application of what is taught by the Vedas. Indeed, the *dharma* enunciated by the Vedas finds its expression in the *dharma* protected by the King and observed by men. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that *dharma* is applied by the numbers of creatures inhabiting the three worlds, as is attested here by the use of the term *loka* which signifies the “world” before signifying “people” or “men”, and, similarly, in the *Mahābhārata*, by the character of Jaṭāyu, the King of vultures, and a friend of Daśaratha, who, by filiation – he is the son of the god Dharma – is entitled to teach *dharma*. “One cannot make them hear the practice of the Vedas” should therefore be understood as “one cannot make them understand *dharma*”. Coming back to the terms of the gods’ vow, formulated by Indra, Abhinavagupta adds to the picture of anarchy (p. 11):

Everyone in the Kṛtayuga fulfilled his own duty, for, at that time, the supremacy of *sattva* was unchallenged. But nowadays [in the Tretāyuga], owing to their rājasical bent (*rājasatva*), possessed with a tremendous hubris and similar to *śūdras* – that is belonging to [those hybrid castes called] Karaṇas etc. –, men are no longer devoted to the respective duties of the three classes of society.

In this way licentiousness – one aspect of the *grāmyadharmā* – results in a confusion between the classes, which is emblematic of the confusion between *svadharma*s. Indeed, it is remarked in the commentary that one is not to understand “the classes of *śūdras* are not able to understand it [the practice of the Vedas]”, but “men as a whole, most of whom are reduced to the condition of *śūdras* for having transgressed – among others – the rules of endogamy, are not able to understand it”. This accounts for our translation: “these generations of *śūdras*”. It is indeed a time of disorder and confusion. To this must be added the powerlessness of *śāstras* and Vedas to educate such men (p. 11):

Moreover *śāstras* instruct in such a way that a mere statement fails to make men pay heed to their prescriptions, and [those men] are not fit for the teachings of Vedas and *śāstras* anyway.

This explains why Bhiarata says: "One cannot make them hear the practice of the Vedas", i.e. "one cannot make them understand *dharma*" – *saṃśrāvya* meaning, as unfolded by the commentary (p. 11), "they cannot be properly (*sa-* = *samyak* = *sthāne*) taught by way of the Śruti, or oral transmission of the Vedas".

It means that the stern pointless coercion of the *śāstras* and the Śruti should be replaced, in this Tretāyuga, by an "object of play (*krīḍanīyaka*) to be seen and heard (*dṛśyaṃ śravyaṃ ca*)", as taught by line 11.

4. *krīḍanīyakam icchāmo*

Then the commentary provides a brilliant display of the implicit significances in the passage, emphasising for instance the indefinite character of this object of play for the gods themselves as – according to Abhinavagupta – the suffix *-ka* indicates that they fail to perceive such an object clearly (p. 9), as well as the necessary association of this object of play with both the Tretāyuga, during which men waver between joy and grief, and the Jambudvīpa, defined as a land of action (*karmabhūmi*). Indeed, as explained in the commentary (p. 9), playing (*krīḍi*) is devised for who is both happy and unhappy, as it averts men's hearts from sorrow and fills them with – however ephemeral – joy:

For one has nothing to do with playing either in a time and space full of happiness only or in a time and space full of unhappiness only.

Now the commentary (p. 9) puts the following words on the lips of the gods who at least know that much about the object they hanker for:

This [object of play (*krīḍanīyaka*)] of ours is similar to the bitter medicine hidden under sugar, for the very fruit of what is nothing but a diversion of the mind is not known [to men].

The fruitfulness of such an object of play consists in knowing this *dharma* which comes into effect in the observance of the four *puruṣārthas*. The two verbal adjectives "to be seen and heard" add something to this idea – or rather principle – which accounts for the creation of drama: "to be seen" means that the object is pleasant, and

“to be heard” that it is intended to teach, but to do so in a pleasant way. Therefore, the commentary concludes (p. 10), the gods wish for “something offering both pleasure (*prīti*) and instruction (*vyutpatti*)”.

For, in the commentary, the pun of Bharata’s text – *śravyaṃ* (l. 11)/ *na samśrāvyah* (l.12) – should be underlined and developed, as it paves the way for the ultimate equivalence: the theatre is a fifth Veda. Since these generations of *śūdras* fail to hear the stern teaching of the Śruti, they must be given something different to hear: something different, namely drama, this object of play whose visual dimension ensures its seductive power all the more as it combines with these elements of sound which are recitation, songs and music (another way of understanding *śravyaṃ*), all of them being the components of this complete form of art that is Indian drama.

Therefore drama truly deserves to be this fifth Veda about which Abhinavagupta, when commenting upon line 17, further recalls (p. 14) that, according to its very etymology – such is the significance of the root *vid* –, it signifies “a spontaneous knowledge, thus contrasting with *śāstras* whose very essence, once they have been approached, is to instruct overwhelmingly either by enjoining or by yoking [someone to some action]”.

The principle according to which every single element of a *śāstra* should convey a meaning applies all the more in this precise instance as the wish uttered by the gods defines drama and reveals its essence. This explains why the gods’ words: “we want” are liable to a twofold interpretation. Taking up Bharata’s narrative again (lines 8-12), Abhinavagupta comments it as follows (p. 10):

He [Bharata] says: «Men inhabiting the Jambudvīpa ruled by the guardians of directions satisfy heaven (*nāka*) itself by remaining in their own duty and by performing sacrifices etc.».

Therefore the words “we want”, concludes the exegete, means unanimity among the gods whose interest lies in the restoration of *dharma*, once men have been educated. The remark is noteworthy as it illustrates the social and cosmic dimension of *dharma*.

At a second level of analysis, Abhinavagupta adds (*ibid.*), the aim of the gods is their own entertainment: like men of the Tretāyuga

whose hearts are permeated with *rajas*, the gods, whose hearts have been permeated in turn with the *rajas* with which men have tinged their sacrifices, have come to experience joy and grief. Therefore they too need an object of play able to divert them from grief. In both interpretations, it is obvious that *dharma* and *adharma* are the concern of men and gods alike.

5. *sārvavarṇikam*

The next remark in the commentary (p. 11) states in a similar way the twofold meaning of *sārvavarṇika*: either drama, the fifth Veda, is “aimed for all classes alike”, so as to educate them, or, in order to avoid any repetition – as the idea was already implicit in “it cannot be passed on to these generation of *śūdras*” –, it might be the Veda “in which all classes are represented” in so far as:

The *sārvavarṇikaveda* is born from, i.e. grounded in that *kāvya* [i.e. the dramatic text] in which the respective duties of all classes are described in a relishable and beautiful way. [Therefore a Veda] by which all men, getting the import in a relishable, beautiful and pleasing manner, also acquire – inevitably related to its enjoyment as [happens] while partaking medicines put in milk – the knowledge of whatever is to be done and whatever is not. Therefore the theatre is instructing men of a soft [i.e. dull] disposition whether they are entitled [to Vedas] or not. Through the consonance (*saṃvāda*) [of their heart with that of the poet], even those who have not heard the *śāstras* reach the stable awareness of the distinction between what is to be done and what is not.

Thus, whichever the interpretation of *sārvavarṇika* – whether the fifth Veda is “aimed for all classes alike” or whether it is the one “in which all classes are represented” –, the conclusion remains unchanged: drama, as a fifth Veda, educates all men with no exception, whether they are entitled to receive the Vedas – i.e. whether they have retained their status as *dvijas* – or whether they have stooped to a lower status. It is the one and only means to educate the men who are lowered to the level of *śūdras* as well as to educate those among the *dvijas* whose feeble minds fail to discriminate between what should be done and what should not, i.e. between *dharma* and *adharma*.

6. An outline of aesthetic theory

Furthermore, the text is quite important in that it outlines a theory about aesthetic experience: the consonance (*saṃvāda*) here is that of the hearts (*hṛdayasaṃvāda*), the second stage of the aesthetic process whose organisation may be briefly recalled¹².

It all starts with the stage of generalisation and universalisation (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*). The theatre presents the spectator with a plot, heroes – mythical or fictional – out of time and space, and, above all, an ambiguous being who, neither thoroughly an actor nor a character, ends up blurring the limits of the ego as well as those of time and space. Accordingly, the spectator gets from the play this quasi-direct perception whereby India theorises what Western civilisation endeavours to define: the theatre is that unheard of event about which Lechý Elbernon claims in *L'Échange* that it is «something untrue presented as if it were true». Liberated from his status as a finite creature, the spectator then becomes able to see and feel everything with impunity.

Then comes the stage of the consonance of hearts (*hṛdayasaṃvāda*) during which, having recaptured its limpidity, the spectator's mirror-heart is one with the poet's, thereby preparing the next stage of the process: the identification (*tanmayībhāva*) of the spectator with the play, which is itself a reflection of the world stage, which means, furthermore, an identification – in which the formulation of the *Chandogya-Upaniṣad* “You are That” (*tat tvam asi*) comes true – of the individual Self with the universal one, of the individual with the cosmos. Such an identification ultimately reaches its climax in aesthetic emotion – or *rasa* –, that delight which is related to mystical ecstasy in more than one way, and which heralds the Deliverance sealed by the disappearance of the fundamental opposition between subject and object.

Being thus raptured, the spectator simultaneously attains the intuitive and spontaneous knowledge of what should and what should not be done, namely of good actions and bad deeds, for both objects

12. For a more detailed exposition, see L. BANSAT-BOUDON, “Le cœur-miroir. Remarques sur la théorie indienne de l'expérience esthétique et ses rapports avec le théâtre” in *Cahiers de philosophie* 14, avril 1992, pp.135-154.

of drama, pleasure and education, flavour and knowledge are simultaneous rather than consecutive.

Such is Abhinavagupta's teaching in another text, the *Locana*, the commentary on *Dhvanyāloka*: "Pleasure (*prīti*) and instruction (*vyutpatti*) are not different in form: in fact, these two objects are one" (*Locana* ad DhāL III 14). Like the sick man taking his bitter medicine with sugared milk, the spectator who must, as it were, be cured of the ailment of living – the effect of *adharma* – gets a simultaneous taste of knowledge and flavour, a flavour yet enhanced by the spectator's awareness of having been taught through it.

As can be seen, *dharma* – whatever its acceptations – is at the core of the speculations in chapter one.

Dharma, *puruṣārthas* and the ways of the world

However, there is a leitmotiv in Abhinavagupta's commentary: drama instructs the whole mankind in the *dharma* understood as the entity encompassing the quadruple group of the *puruṣārthas*, with *dharma* in the strict sense, i.e. as system of observances, ranking among the first – this quadruple group differing in its achievements according to the *svadharmas*, and finding its embodiment in the wide range of human behaviour. Thus *dharma* appears to be both the good and what leads to it.

For instance, commenting (p. 11) the passage in which drama is defined as *dharmya* (I.14) "conducive to *dharma*", Abhinavagupta explains that "favourable to *dharma*" means "conducive to the four *puruṣārthas*"¹³. Abhinavagupta further observes that the fact that drama teaches *dharma* – i.e. the means whereby the *puruṣārthas* can be reached – in a more reliable way than Vedas or *śāstras* does not only lie with the pleasure and rapture derived from it: it is also directly perceived. The notion – an essential one – is the explanatory principle of both objects of drama. The direct (*pratyakṣa*) – or, more

13. *dharmaśabdena catvāro 'pi puruṣārthas teṣu sādhu sādhakam*: "dharma [means] all four *puruṣārthas*, and [*dharmya* means] what is good for them, i. e. what accomplishes them".

accurately, nearly direct (*pratyakṣakalpa*) – perception (*pratīti*)¹⁴ of the play is what allows for the start of the whole mechanism of aesthetic experience. And that self-same direct perception of the play is what provides drama with its function of enlightenment, for it shows what *dharma* is by showing its fruit.

The idea is recurrent in Indian texts: as an abstract entity, the *dharma* understood as a set of observances can be assessed by its effects. Thus does Rāghavabhaṭṭa, commenting upon the stanza of *Śakuntalā* – «Was it a dream, an illusion-of-magic, a mental delusion or else the tenuous fruit of a marred merit» (VI, 10) – remark: «How can the tenuity of the suprasensitive (*atīndriya*) *dharma* be known? By its fruit».

In real life the contemplation of *dharma* – i.e. of sacrifices and virtuous conduct – does not necessarily play an educational part, since the fruit of sacrifice and virtuous conduct is more often than not delayed, sometimes until the next birth, and therefore invisible (*adrṣṭa*) at the moment. Conversely, in drama, only the five or six days of the performance come between the action itself and its fruit. In such a way, as the moral follows the fable directly, drama does achieve its educational vocation.

This is also claimed by actress Lechy Elbernon in *L'Échange*: «In our own lives, nothing happens, nothing that goes the whole way. Nothing begins and nothing ends. It is worth going to the theatre to see something happening. Do you hear me? Something really happening, with a beginning and an» (second version, act I)¹⁵.

In another passage of his commentary on chapter one (ad 1.58), Abhinavagupta develops (p. 24) the following theme: in order that the fruit of the action be displayed, the action itself must necessarily belong to the past, and even to a glorious and mythical past: «There is in effect no point in representing contemporary modes of conduct in which actions – carried out accordingly to *dharma*, etc. – and their

14. See L. BANSAT-BOUDON, "Le cœur-miroir", pp. 146-147.

15. "Dans notre vie à nous, rien n'arrive. Rien qui aille d'un bout à l'autre. Rien ne commence, rien ne finit.

Ça vaut la peine d'aller au théâtre pour voir quelque chose qui arrive. Vous entendez! Qui arrive pour de bon! Qui commence et qui finisse!"

fruits are not directly perceived as clearly related». Similarly, at the opening of his commentary on *bhaviṣyatas* (I.14), Abhinavagupta remarks (p. 12): «One should use one's own throat mainly to extol the virtues of the lineage of the royal Sages of the past rather than of those to come».

In the mythical narrative in chapter one, the passage (I.14-16) coming almost immediately after the wish expressed by the gods (I.12) must be similarly understood. At this moment Brahmā, taking the ritual resolution (*saṃkalpa*) to carry out that wish, formulates it in two lines (14-15):

«Along with *itihāsa*, I shall make a fifth Veda entitled *nāṭya*, conducive to *dharma* (*dharmya*) etc., which is to be desired by all (*arthya*), and celebrated as such (*yaśasya*), which is endowed with whatever means are to be taught and with the perfect understanding [which its direct perceptibility makes possible], which is meant for showing all their actions to men of the future, which is enriched with the teachings of all the *śāstras* and promoting all the arts». Once he had so resolved, the Divine One, recollecting all the Vedas, created the *Nāṭyaveda* out of the four Vedas.

One may notice that this “object of play” which stands for a fifth Veda is first termed here (I.15) as “drama” (*nāṭya*).

My translation of lines 14 and 15 is derived from the commentary which establishes the rightful opinion through the refutation of differing positions. In fact, some exegetes conclude from the use of the three words – *dharmyam* / *arthyam* / *yaśasyam* – that the purpose of drama is to instruct men in *dharma* and *artha* and that its aim is glory (*yaśas*). Nevertheless, as Abhinavagupta argues (p. 11):

«In this ritual resolution, similar to an impregnation (*garbhadhāna*) giving birth to *nāṭya*, whatever would be left out would indeed be left out [forever]¹⁶».

This is a clear statement of the forceful value of the *saṃkalpa*: only what has been resolved will occur. Taking the resolution that

16. *nāṭyotpattigarbhādhānakalpe cāsmiṃ saṃkalpe yat tyaktam tat tyaktam eva.*

drama should be favourable to *dharma* and *artha* would amount to excluding the other two *puruṣārthas* from this definition of drama:

Besides, whereas fame is the result of *dharma*, why should it be separately enumerated? All the more so as the words *sopadeśam*, etc. would [then] be redundant. Therefore, such is the meaning: *dharma* [means] all four *puruṣārthas* [and *dharma* means] what is good for them, i.e. what accomplishes them.

Accordingly, as an “object of play to be seen and heard” as well as “aimed for all classes”, the fifth Veda called drama must restore *dharma* by displaying it in its full glory, i.e. by showing the beneficial fruits reaped – for themselves and for the whole universe – by such mythical heroes as Rāma and Yudhiṣṭhira by observing *dharma*. Symmetrically, it teaches men to renounce *adharma* by showing its noxious effects embodied by a negative hero like Rāvaṇa.

However – as the commentator insists once again (p. 12) – the educational function of drama is made possible only thanks to its well-established reputé as a delightful entertainment (*yaśasyam*) which makes it an object desirable for all:

Even if it is so, by what [means] are men prompted to that [theatre]? He [Bharata] says *arthyam*: it is an object to be desired by all, for it pleases all, and for all are entitled to [attend] it.

It is the outline of the theme that will be developed in the chapter dealing with success (*siddhi*): the young man comes to the theatre in search of love, the Sage finds interest in Deliverance, women and children are fond of laughter and of the beauty of costumes, etc.¹⁷

Let us proceed with our study of the text. Near the end of the narrative, Brahmā has to provide an explanation about his creation to the Demons, furious that the victory of the gods – and therefore their own defeat – should have been chosen as the subject of the first performance on stage.

17. NŚ XXVII 58-61a. See L. BANSAT-BOUDON, *Poétique*, p. 187.

This defence of drama is the ultimate opportunity for Brahmā to provide multiple definitions of it, as if he were trying to grasp its secret complexity: «For drama gloriously retells the emotive states of the entire Triple universe» (I 107 b)¹⁸.

Brahmā then displays this definition through a series of *ślokas* (108-112) in which – intermingled with activities and feelings – the three *puruṣārthas* – *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* – are enumerated:

Being sometimes *dharma*, sometimes playing (*krīḍa*), sometimes *artha*, sometimes serenity (*śama*), sometimes laughter, sometimes fight, sometimes *kāma*, sometimes killing – *dharma* of those who have observed *dharma*, *kāma* of those who have enjoyed *kāma*, destruction of the wicked, restraint of those who are disciplined, birth of audacity in cowards [generating laughter], energy of those who think they are heroes, enlignment of those who are not enlignment, erudition of those who are erudites, sports (*vilāsa*) of the princes, firmness of those who are afflicted with sorrow, *artha* of those who are subsisting on *artha*, steadiness of those whose minds are agitated –, endowed with all sentiments, made of all possible situations: such I have created this theatre, which imitates the world's behaviour (*lokavṛttānukaraṇaṃ nāṭyam etan mayā kṛtam*).

As we can see, this long enumeration conveys the view of a society which is in a certain way ideal for being corrected by the spectator's knowledge of the effects – whether good or bad –, of actions and behaviour performed on stage. For the moral judgement the spectator is then able to pass puts values right, initiating some sort of general redemption.

Besides, Abhinavagupta goes further than the text and establishes a partially uncommon¹⁹ correspondence between each *puruṣārtha* and the eight or nine *sthāyibhāvas*, these “permanent feelings”, constituents of human psychology, which are sublimated in eight – or nine – *rasas* in the aesthetic order.

18. *traikokasyāśya sarvasya nāṭyaṃ bhāvānukīrtanam* (107 b).

19. For there is a notable exception: the fully developed discussion, initiated by Abhinavagupta in his *Abhinavabhāratī*, on the *sthāyibhāva* of the *śāntarasa* which, according to some, is *mokṣa* itself. See *infra*, pp. 23 ff. and n. 22.

Dharma and *artha*, as we learn from the *Abhinavabhāratī* (p. 37), correspond to energy (*utsāha*), a fundamental feeling aimed to reach its climax in the Heroic sentiment – the *vīrarasa* –²⁰, and *kāma* corresponds to the voluptuousness (*rati*) that will find its expression in the Erotic sentiment, the *śṛṅgārarasa*. Even in the case of *mokṣa*, a correspondence is implicitly established with the system of *sthāyibhāvas* and *rasas*: in the passage of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* that has just been examined, serenity (*śama*) indeed alludes to *nirveda* – or detachment – a permanent feeling that is to culminate in the Peaceful, the *śāntarasa*.

The subsequent conclusion of the commentary (p. 38-39) is that of an equivalence between the *puruṣārthas*, the world's behaviour which is their outcome and the heroes who embody them:

Since the activity which is drama (*nāṭyakriyā*) is in keeping with the world's behaviour, and since, in this world, the *puruṣārthas*, *dharma*, etc., are embodied in innumerable persons, they are not easily understandable. Hence, whoever is well-known in matters of *dharma*, etc., such as Rāma, etc., has been taken here in a main, i.e. in a direct way, as being useful [in providing an ideal] by his mere name.

Further on, Abhinavagupta thus comments upon *Nāṭyaśāstra* I 114, p. 39:

This drama offers instruction in the world's behaviour, i.e. in the host of ways – or means – leading to *dharma*, etc. (*dharmādyupāyavarga*).

Thus, to come back on Charles Malamoud's analysis about *puruṣārthas* in general, *dharma* is both “a sphere of activity and an aim in itself”²¹. It is therefore at once the end and the means to this

20. Let us here recall a striking passage of the *Abhinavabhāratī* (p. 3) commenting upon the first line of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the determination expressed therein. Bharata, proclaiming that he is going to expound the doctrine of drama, is portrayed in this passage as an actor, who is going to be filled with *dharmavīrarasa*, that Heroic *rasa* (*vīra*) – and, truly, before undertaking such an enterprise, it is necessary to muster the energy which is to be released in Heroism – on which the ritual resolution he has taken confers a dharmic shade. Thus, on the occasion of this other text, one is again confronted with both the dharmic vocation of the theatre whose rules Bharata is about to enunciate and the association between *dharma* and *utsāha*.

21. Ch. MALAMOU, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

end, provided "means" is understood as the world's behaviour and actions whereby the end is achieved.

Besides, drama instructs in all the ways of the world, whether good or bad, for – as already stated – the specificity of drama, which makes it *alaukika*, i.e. which puts it beyond reality, lies in the display – within the restrictive time and space of the performance – of a complete action, i.e. of an action that finds its completion in its fruit.

This asserts the value of the example and of the counter-example: by witnessing Rāma and Rāvaṇa, and by appreciating the happy and unhappy endings of their respective heroic deeds, one learns to behave like Rāma – and not like Rāvaṇa. This is what the Sages who question Bharata about the origin of drama at the beginning of chapter one have perceived at once:

«In effect, unfolds the commentary (p. 6), [drama] makes directly perceptible (*pratyakṣa*) the exploits of *dhīrodātta*, *dhīralalita*, *dhīroddhata* and *dhīrapraśānta* heroes and those of their adversaries, as bearing success or failure since the former indulge themselves in action with the suitable means (*upāya*) whereas the latter resort to the opposite means. And [drama] makes those [exploits] enter the hearts by [the *rasas* appropriate to each category of heroes]: *vīra* and *adbhuta*; *vīra*, *śṛṅgāra* and *hāsyā*; *vīra*, *raudra*, *bhayānaka* and *karuṇa*; *vīra*, *bībhatsa* and *śānta*, experienced with extreme wonder due to their being interspersed with the other *rasas* related to the hero's adversary.

Even to us, who have understood the very essence of the Vedas, the direct perception we have had of this drama has made it unmistakably clear that, seeping into the hearts, it generates both the wisdom (*dhī*) that consists in resorting to the means of the four *puruṣārthas*, *dharma*, etc., and the renunciation of *adharma*».

As already seen, the epithet *dharmya* sums up the main aspects of the relationships between drama and *dharma*. Indeed, as underlined in the commentary, *dharmya* "dharmic" signifies "conducive to the general *dharma*", the one secured through the observance of the four *puruṣārthas*. Again, as Abhinavagupta tells the reader in his comment upon lines 108-111 (p. 37), this is the reason why such and such *puruṣārtha* is prevalent in a given play or in any of its constitutive parts. He accordingly refers to the prevalence of the *dharma* in the

Chalitarāma, a play that has not come down to us, in which the *aśva-medha* celebrated by Rāma plays a considerable part, as well as to the passage in *Śakuntalā* wherein Duṣyanta, in love with the young ancho-rite, expresses his hope that she belongs by birth to a social class – that of the *kṣatriyas* – that will be no obstacle to their union.

Therefore drama is favourable to the general *dharma* in so far as by teaching it, it contributes to its restoration. As such, it is aimed for the whole society of men – or, rather, of creatures. This explains why, in the *Uttararāmacarita* play within the play (act VII), Vālmiki invites (as announced by the prologue) the four classes alike, mortals and immortals, men and animals, moving and motionless creatures, which amounts to strengthen the status of *dharma* as the social and cosmic order.

Śāntarasa and mokṣa or the spectator as a mumukṣu

However, drama is also useful for the individual, to the one whose competence for a specific *puruṣārtha* is determined by the dual theory of classes and ages which makes it a duty for him to adjust his behaviour accordingly. In this instance drama provides one more opportunity to soften an excessively rigid system – or, in other words, one that causes exclusions. Just as it assumes the value of a fifth Veda, superior to the other four for its being a knowledge accessible to all, similarly it enables everyone to experience *mokṣa*, or Deliverance, regardless of age and social status. In the speculations echoed by the *Abhinavabhāratī*, it is indeed apparent that, within the quadruple group of the *puruṣārthas* individual destinies are concerned about, it is with Deliverance (*mokṣa*) and not with Order (*dharma*) that drama enjoys a privileged relationship.

Thus can be summarised Abhinavagupta's lengthy report (p. 5) of the opinion of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka who interprets the introductory line of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*nāṭyaśāstram pravakṣyāmi brahmaṇā yad udāhṛtam*) as follows:

Of drama given by Brahmā as an example – *yad udāhṛtam* – [of the visible world's irreality] I am going to expose the doctrine.

Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's idea is that drama and the world are the metaphor of each other: equally devoid of reality, drama and the world have one self-same aim: to give man access to the *puruṣārthas* and even to the highest one: Deliverance. Only the means differ: in the world, the study and ensuing meditation of the Veda is what leads to Deliverance, whereas, at the theatre, aesthetic experience does it. By offering drama to humans, Brahmā allows them to behold the irreality of existence in this world, thus inducing them to set themselves free from it.

Relying on a line from the *Nāṭyaśāstra* version which he is commenting upon – «[Though] resorting to their respective causes, [all the] *rasa[s]* originate from *śānta*»²² –, Nāyaka concludes:

22. *svaṃ svaṃ nimitam ādāya śāntād utpadyate rasaḥ*. Text to be found with a variant in *Abhinavabhāratī* ad NŚ XXVII 2a, vol. 3, p. 294 (see *infra*, this note). On the number of *rasas*, as well as on the correspondence between *śāntarasa* and *mokṣa* which have been discussed at length by ancient theoreticians and modern exegetes, see V. RAGHAVAN, *The Number of Rasa-s*, Madras, Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1967, (ALS, 23); J.L. MASSON, M.V. PATWARDHAN, *Śāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics*, Poona, BORI, 1969, (BOS, 9), reprint 1985, and, especially, the remarkable paper of E. GEROW, "Abhinavagupta's Aesthetics as a Speculative Paradigm", in JAOS 114. 2 (1994), pp. 186-208. I will merely give here a summary and make a brief contribution to the debate. Two doctrines are in opposition. The one establishing eight *rasas* is represented by one tradition of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, probably the more ancient one, and by Kālidāsa in *Vikramorvaśī* (II, 18): "The master of Maruts, today, wants to see / the voluptuous game of the performance / endowed with the eight *rasas*/ once entrusted to your care by Sage Bharata, /and the guardians of the world shall be by his side". The second doctrine – represented by a rival tradition of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* defended by Abhinavagupta – introduces a ninth *rasa* – the *śāntarasa*, or the Peaceful – to which, in order to restore the symmetry with the rest of the system characterised by a term-by-term correspondence between *śihāyibhāvas* and *rasas*, detachment (*nirveda*) is ascribed for its counterpart in the psychological order. To explain the respective positions of *śāntarasa* and of the other eight *rasas*, Abhinavagupta (ad NŚ VI *śāntarasaprakaraṇam*, vol. I, p. 335) uses the following metaphor: the *śānta* is "the thread of a dazzling white, shining between the gems sparsely strung on it" – gems which are the eight *rasas*. In another passage, commenting on *Nāṭyaśāstra* XXVII 2a (p. 294), he justifies the superiority of divine success (*daivī siddhi*) over human success (*mānuṣī siddhi*) by the advent of *śāntarasa* in the former: «Although various causes may be attributed to each *rasa*, yet [all] *rasas* originate from the *śānta*». Through these words, the obvious insistence of those who maintain that *śānti* is the source of all the *rasas* is justified by the difference [between the categories of success] established by the *śāstra* concealing a secret meaning". One should note that in this instance Abhinavagupta takes up the very *śloka* previously quoted by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka to support an argumentation with

By this [*śloka*], the supreme purpose [of drama, i.e. to attain Deliverance thanks to *śāntarasa*] has been enunciated.

And Abhinavagupta concludes in his turn (p. 5):

Such is the explanation he [Nāyaka] has taken up in his [*Sa*]hṛdayadarpaṇa where he has stated: “Salutation to Śambhu, the poet, creator of the three Universes, thanks to whom creatures relish the performance of the «world theatre» (*jagannāṭya*)²³ every moment”.

Thus is the metaphor of the “world stage” (*jagannāṭya*) presented as sealing the correspondence between the ultimate goal on stage and the ultimate goal in the world, between the Peaceful, the *śāntarasa*, and Deliverance (*mokṣa*). Just as, in worldly experience, Deliverance can only be reached by utter detachment from objects of senses (*nirveda*), similarly, in the aesthetic order, *nirveda* is the permanent feeling meant to culminate in the Peaceful.

And yet, *nirveda* is not the only possible *sthāyibhāva* of the *śānta* for, according to some schools of thought, it is *vairāgya*, the “elimination of passions”, and according to others, it is *śama*, “serenity”.

Both stands are partly reconciled by the *Abhinavabhāratī* in the first chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Commenting (p. 37) upon line 108 – «Being sometimes *dharma*, sometimes playing (*krīḍa*), sometimes *artha*, sometimes serenity (*śama*)... such I have created this theatre...» – , Abhinavagupta defines *śama* as *nirveda*, – and, what is more, within the context of the *śāntarasa*, since the equation *śama* = *nirveda* appears in a demonstration aimed at establishing a correspondence between the system of the *puruṣārthas* and that of the *rasas* (see *supra*, p. 19 and n. 19).

identical conclusions. As a matter of fact, one feels that the two doctrines differ much less than what could have been assumed: the additive elaboration of *śāntarasa* would only constitute a superior degree of theorisation, and *śāntarasa* would correspond to the *rasa* of the first doctrine, this *rasa* which is referred to in the singular, as the entity transcending the eight modes in which it appears, as the supreme Flavour in which the other eight ones culminate. Besides, that Flavour which signifies aesthetic pleasure is also termed Bliss (*ānanda*), Rest in one’s own Self (*ātma viśrānti*), Serenity (*nirvṛti*), all of them metaphors that reveal or underline its relation with the Peaceful.

23. Literally: “creatures are the relishers (*rasika*) of the performance...”.

Nevertheless, Abhinavagupta's view is to be found in his commentary on chapter VI, in his long exposition about *śāntarasa*. Ultimately, the *sthāyibhāva* of the *śāntarasa* is the Self proper, the *ātman*, and not these "modalités du vécu" (modes of the experienced)²⁴ which are detachment (*nirveda*), the elimination of passions (*vairāgya*) and serenity (*śama*).

One may notice that the metaphor of the thread sparkling under the coloured gems, which is used to render the respective statuses of the *śānta* and of the other eight *rasas*²⁵, is the age-old vedantic image of the *sūtrātman*, the "thread of the *ātman*" that "holds together those pearls or jewels which are finite and perceptible realities"²⁶.

This doctrine of the *ātman* considered as the only substratum of the *śāntarasa* obviously strengthens the connection between Deliverance and the Peaceful. In fact, the sign of Deliverance is the "rest in the Self" – *ātmaviśrānti* – which confirms the abolition of all duality and finitude, and wherein the two competitive theories of the *rasa* and of the *śāntarasa* are reconciled, both of them being defined as such.

Therefore what seems – in the system of the *varṇāśramadharmā* – to be mainly the privilege of the *brāhman* and the *saṃnyāsin*²⁷, that fourth goal of man which is generally designated as supreme (*paramapuruṣārtha*) for its exacting character, is, in aesthetic experience, available to all people alike in its culminating form of soothed delight. Indeed, such is in *Vikramorvaśī*, one of the possible interpretations of the *nāndī*, the inaugural blessing:

The One named Supreme Being by the Vedānta
And who occupies the invested sky and earth,
Whose name of Lord is all-meaningful,
Applying to him alone,
And that men in quest of Deliverance (*mumukṣu*)

24. M. HULIN, *Le Principe de l'ego dans la pensée indienne classique. La notion d'ahaṅkāra*, Paris, De Boccard, 1978, p. 355.

25. See n. 22.

26. M. HULIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 354-355.

27. Ch. MALAMOUD, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-160.

Seek within themselves, with mastered breath,
 May this unchanging God – of easy access
 To perennial faith and contemplation –
 Bring happiness to you.

When the *nāṇdī* calls on the audience the favour of this god whom men eager to be made free are seeking within themselves through asceticism, does it not imply that the spectator too is this *mumukṣu*, this man aspiring to Deliverance (*mokṣa*)? Does this *nāṇdī* not wish that the performance would fulfill his expectations, and that supreme happiness²⁸ one can only deserve in this world through the highest ascetic practices be offered to him, at the theatre, all finitude and duality being abolished, in the spontaneity and immediacy of aesthetic pleasure? And then, little does it matter if that experience of Deliverance has the essential transience of the theatrical performance.

Therefore, according to Abhinavagupta whose analysis is grounded on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* text itself, what is ultimately at stake is this: drama is the instrument of the general *dharma*, and the spectator, thus instructed about *dharma*, also makes the individual and supreme experience of Deliverance.

APPENDIX OR THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE ACTOR

The connections between drama and *dharma* have been analysed from the point of view of the spectator for whom the gods intended this “object of play to be seen and heard” and which acts as a fifth Veda. But then, what is the actor’s role in such a speculation?

As drama is part of the general *dharma*, there is a *svadharma* of actors that consists in acting – and thereby in bringing to life – that *dharma*-restoring drama. And they are taught that *svadharma* – as is the case with any *svadharma* – through an *āgama*, a canonical text which is

28. The term used in the stanza is *niḥśreyasa* “sovereign good”, synonymous with *mokṣa*.

no other than the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Or, to be more precise, such is Abhinavagupta's argument (ad NŚ I 1) when he undertakes to justify drama before those who mistrust it. It is true, he argues (p. 3), that Manu, who legislates on *dharma* in general, condemns drama. Yet, there is a *svadharma* of the actor which is strictly established by tradition – being itself guaranteed by a lineage of actors and by a treatise, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which asserts (XXXVII 26-27): «The one who practises drama (*kuryāt prayogaṃ yah*) obtains the same fruits as those who know Vedas and sacrifices or those who make offerings». And it is common knowledge that the one who celebrates sacrifices and makes offerings goes up to heaven, and the one who knows Vedas gets delivered.

«Indeed, Abhinavagupta remarks (p. 4), this [drama] must be performed by actors, since that is the *svadharma* attributed to them by tradition». Moreover, «according to the rule, no [*sva*]dharma can be inferred without [the help of] the [appropriate] *āgama*».

The exegete then concludes:

The main purpose of this treatise is to teach the activity specific to great actors as it has come down to us today. Indeed, complying with the teaching of Sage Bharata, after – on Viriñci's advice – he had started bringing drama into existence on the occasion of the first performance, the lineage of pupils has kept close to the tradition.

Thus the object – drama – generating a tradition is in turn legitimated by it.

We have seen previously how the promise (NŚ XXXVII 26-27) made to the actor that Deliverance should be the fruit of his *svadharma* was the justification of drama itself. Abhinavagupta re-examines this point while commenting upon the passage in which Brahmā enjoins Sage Bharata and his hundred sons to be the first actors of the theatre he has just created (*Nāṭyaśāstra* I 23): «These *ṛṣis* who know the secret meaning of the Vedas should be employed in theatre practice». Furthermore, Abhinavagupta comments (p. 16), such a definition suggests «their acting capacity which is [achieved in] the *sāttvikābhīnaya*²⁹ conducive to *rasa* [...]». This is why – he concludes – due to his

29. The *sāttvikābhīnaya* is more than the *sāttvikābhāvas* and the *sāttvikālaṅkāras* to which it is generally reduced. It is the truth of the enactment, that which makes it be: *sat-tva*. See L. BANSAT-BOUDON, *Poétique*, p. 148.

spiritual concentration (*dhāraṇa*), the actor too reaches the supreme *puruṣārtha* [: Deliverance] secondarily».

Deliverance is therefore both within the spectator and the actor's reach, although through different ways. For the spectator, the experience of aesthetic delight coincides with that of Deliverance. For the actor, concerned with stage-acting and not with this petrifying enchantment which is that of the spectator³⁰, the experience of Deliverance will come as the fruit of another contemplation – of an inner kind altogether – which endows him with the ability to convey Emotion (*sattva*) on stage.

Clearly enough, the pattern of explanation concerning the actor is found to be the same as the one concerning the spectator. The actor, whose *svadharma*, as a social being, consists in his being the instrument of a theatre which is itself instrumental to the general *dharma*, is nevertheless entitled, as an individual, to individually reach Deliverance – the supreme *puruṣārtha* – in the exercise of his *svadharma* itself. That is the fruit of theatre practice, be it active or passive, according to whether one is an actor or a spectator.

30. See L. BANSAT-BOUDON, *op. cit.*, p. 435.